



1201 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NW
Suite 500
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
Telephone: 202-496-1000
Facsimile: 202-496-1300

FACSIMILE

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TO: Department of Justice, Registration Unit

FAX NUMBER: (202) 514-2836

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SAUDI ARABIA | IN FOCUS

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SAUDI ARABIA

King inaugurates 5th session of Shura Council

King Abdullah inaugurated the 5th session of the Shura Council in Riyadh on April 24. During his address, the King praised the government's handling of the global financial crisis, noting that the Saudi economy has come out relatively unscathed thus far. "We are still watching the situation with caution and vigilance," he said, adding that domestic development projects have continued. The King called for greater monitoring of global financial sectors to prevent a recurrence of the crisis.

King Abdullah also stressed the importance of the Arab reconciliation process. "We will continue – God willing – until every difference is eliminated, knowing that victory can not be achieved for the nation that engages in fighting itself," he declared. In particular, the King called for a unified response to the plight of the Palestinians and demanded that the world community prevent further Israeli attacks. "If this aggression continues," he warned, "it will lead the whole region of the Middle East to the brink of abyss and this will threaten world peace." The King held up the Arab peace plan, which he proposed at an Arab summit in 2002, as the best solution to the conflict.

Finally, King Abdullah reflected on the success of his global interfaith dialogue initiative, which culminated in international conferences in Madrid and New York last year. Stressing the importance of promoting understanding between civilizations, he noted that the ultimate aim of the initiative is to refocus international relations on "the human commonality" among the peoples of the world. "Focusing on points of differences among the followers of religions and cultures leads to fanaticism and sows seeds of sedition and animosity," he said. "This creates conflicts that might take the form of destructive wars which are not justified by any divine religion or ethical principle."

Prince Nayef appointed Second Deputy Prime Minister

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz issued a royal order on March 27 appointing Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz to the position of Second Deputy Prime Minister. The order took effect immediately. The previous day, King Abdullah appointed Prince Mashaal bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to be Governor of Najran province.

ARAB WORLD

King Abdullah leads Saudi delegation to Doha summit

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King Abdullah led the Saudi delegation to the 21st Arab Summit Conference, which was held in Doha on March 30. Also participating in the summit were Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, Libyan President Muammar Al-Qaddafi, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki, Yemeni President Ali Saleh, Tunisian President Zine Al-Abidine and Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah.

Addressing the session, Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani expressed appreciation for the Arab reconciliation initiative advanced by King Abdullah at the Kuwait summit earlier this year. He also welcomed the participation of King Abdullah in the G-20 economic summit to be held Thursday in London. "We do feel that King Abdullah will represent all of us at the summit and we hope he will succeed in his mission," the Qatari Emir said. "I am certain that King Abdullah will represent the interests of the Arab world and even the developing countries and their aspirations."

SAUDI ARABIA-U.S.

SAGIA Governor encourages U.S. investment in Kingdom

Governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) Amr Al-Dabbagh stressed the strength of the Kingdom's economy and its resilience in the face of the global financial crisis during an address in Washington, DC on March 24. Speaking at a luncheon hosted in his honor by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Al-Dabbagh noted that the establishment of highly advanced industrial cities in the Kingdom has laid the foundation for unprecedented investment opportunities in the energy, transport, industry, information, facilities and services sectors.

Al-Dabbagh observed that Saudi Arabia now ranks 18th in terms of its volume of foreign investment – an amount that has doubled 19 times since 2000 and now exceeds \$80 billion. He called on U.S. businessmen and companies to take advantage of the strong investment climate enjoyed by Saudi Arabia, which has had one of the strongest economies in the world.

King Abdullah receives former U.S. President Bill Clinton

King Abdullah received former U.S. President Bill Clinton and his accompanying delegation in Riyadh on March 24. During the meeting, they discussed a variety of issues of common interest.



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Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*